Trak 15

A Multimedia Fanzine

FRAK 15

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CONSPIRACIES

A "Campbells" story
by Janet Ellicott

Perhaps you're right, the letter said. *Now that Father's dead, there's no-one to keep me in Scotland. I warn you, however, my dear Malcolm, that you and Martha will not find my stay a short one. I do know what you are trying to do with your letters. You think to marry me to another Doctor, don't you, Malcom? Well, perhaps your Dr Campbell <u>is</u> the man you say he is: perhaps he isn't. But I am no longer the girl who longed for a man to love her and father her children. Perhaps, in Canada, I will find a man I can live out my life with, who will be a companion for my old age, or who needs a woman to care for his children, but I will not fall in love again. Robert is still too dear to me. He died because of what Scotland has become, a Scotland I once loved but can never love again.*

Forgive me for becoming maudlin, my dear, but you know I loved Robert as surely as you love your Martha. And I loved my son as much as you love yours. I will never forget or forgive their deaths, and I will never return to Scotland.

This letter will doubtless reach you before I do. Look for me, Malcolm. I shall sail for Canada as soon as I can book passage. God knows there will be work enough for me on the ship. What has happened to our country, Malcolm? Why must everyone who is decent and hardworking leave her for the Canadas?

I have heard of your Dr Campbell even here, dear brother. You must know that he recently returned to Scotland. I tell you this - he will never come here again. Of that much, I am certain. Perhaps I <u>should</u> meet him. We have much in common, it seems, but then there are many in the Canadas who were treated unfairly here, in Scotland. And of course I shall meet your Doctor. I am a midwife, am I not? He will need my help in your growing community. Perhaps, in time, even for his own children and grandchildren, but I shall not fall in love with him and I shall never bear another child, to him or any other man. I hope, for his sake, that he finds another wife before I reach your new land because I can only bring him pain.

The one thing James Campbell hated more than any other was a meddling old woman who thought she knew more about medicine than a qualified doctor did, so he was understandably annoyed when he heard, on his return from Scotland, that Rev MacDonald's sister, who was coming out from the Old Country to live with him, was a midwife and, according to her brother, something of an expert with herbs and simples. He did his best to forget that the woman was coming but, one morning, he was at Logan's to pick up the mail and there was the minister, waiting to meet her from the supply wagon. James decided, in the interests of diplomacy, not to wait but he wasn't an easy person to live with for the next few days, especially when he heard the other women praising Miss MacDonald and passing her advice among themselves.

A fortnight later, the Campbells had still not met the woman the rest of the community were talking of. Neil had almost forgotten her when he dismounted from his horse outside Logan's in time to see an attractive woman trip on the rough step and drop everything she was carrying. Being both a gentleman and curious, he went to help her. They had barely got her packages into her wagon when it started to rain.

"I am not driving home in this," she declared in a distinctive Scottish brogue. "And you've just arrived, haven't you? May I buy you a drink in return for your kindness, young sir?"

"You may buy me a cup of coffee," Neil returned. "My father doesn't like me to drink anything stronger, and I do have a lot to do today. Besides, it wouldn't be proper to let a lady buy me a real drink."

To his surprise, she smiled knowingly. "I should have guessed. You're Dr Campbell's son, aren't you?"

"How did you know?" he asked as he held the door open for her.

"Only a doctor or minister would worry about what his son drank, and only a gentleman's son would refuse a drink from a lady. I'm Margaret MacDonald."

James had heard more than enough of Margaret that day. Everywhere he went it seemed that she had already been, accompanying her brother on his rounds and exchanging recipes and advice with the women.

"Why don't you go and talk to her?" Neil asked when he mentioned the problem at home. James just looked at his eldest child. "I know you're tired," Neil said sympathetically, "but surely you're not so tired that you can't think for yourself. Go and talk to her, Father."

"Do you know something I don't?" James asked then.

"Perhaps," Neil admitted grudgingly.

"Something you can share?" James prompted.

"I met Margaret MacDonald, that's all." James recognised the look in his son's eyes. The new midwife had obviously made one more conquest - it wasn't just the women who had been talking about her.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked gently but Neil shook his head.

"No, Father, there's nothing to talk about."

Later that evening, however, when the younger children were in bed and James was enjoying the peace and quiet of a summer's evening, Neil came out on the porch to sit beside him.

"I didn't want to talk in front of John and Emma," he said then. "Father, Margaret MacDonald is a very special woman. She reminds me a lot of Mother."

"Indeed." James was impressed. John and Emma spoke of their mother often but he had not heard Neil speak of her since they had come to Canada. The last time, in fact, had been when the two of them were standing by her grave, as the young Laird was laid to rest a short distance away. Neil had said then that she wasn't there, implying that he believed the teachings of the church, and that his mother had gone to her heavenly reward, but he had never said so much in words and he had never spoken of her since. "Tell me about her," he invited, knowing that Neil would do so whether he wanted him to or not.

"She's a real lady, Father, like Mother and Mrs Sims. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes, I know. How did you meet her? It was at Logan's, I presume. You've been nowhere else today."

"Yes, it was at Logan's. She dropped her packages and I helped her to pick them up. It was raining too hard for either of us to leave so we had a cup of coffee and talked. Miss MacDonald said she'd heard a lot about you and wanted to meet you."

"Did she indeed?"

"I think you'll like her, Father. I do, very much."

"Enough to make you forget Rebecca?" James teased gently.

Neil blushed. "I don't like her in that way, Father. She is Reverend MacDonald's *elder* sister after all. Margaret is much more like Rebecca's stepmother, someone I could talk to about anything, like Mother." He kept saying that, James realised, *like Mother*, and he suddenly knew what Neil was saying. He had been attracted to other women since the death of his wife, and he had considered marriage to at least one of them, but he had never felt that his children would accept a stepmother and, having seen first hand how difficult that role had been for Harriet Sims, he had never pursued his interest in any of the women concerned. Neil was telling him that he

liked Margaret enough to let her take his mother's place in his life. Or was he? Was Neil so much in love with Rebecca that he wanted everyone else to feel the same way? There was only one way to find out.

"I'll go to see her tomorrow," he promised, and the smile in Neil's eyes told him that Neil was hoping for more than a professional relationship to come from their meeting.

James was roused from his bed in the small hours of the morning, to attend to a dying old woman. Three cows, two horses, a dog and an injured child later, he arrived at the Murray farm, expecting to deliver Mrs Murray of a healthy child. He was too late. As he dismounted from his horse, he heard the wail of a healthy pair of lungs and the proud father came out to tell him that he now had both a son and a daughter.

"The twins are a little small," an unfamiliar voice explained, "but they're healthy enough. Do you want to see for yourself, Doctor?"

He followed the sound of the voice and found a stranger holding a small bundle out to him. He examined both babies before he dared to look at her.

"Margaret MacDonald, I presume," he said when he handed the girl back.

"Hardly a difficult assumption, Doctor Campbell." She smiled at him, a smile which did make him think of his dead wife. In fact, it was easy to see what Neil had meant about the resemblance. It wasn't a physical one, even though they shared the same name - this Margaret was dark haired, where his Margaret had been blonde, and she was considerably taller and heavier - but the likeness was there all the same, the same stamp of good breeding, commonsense and a sound education. "I had intended to come to see you today, Doctor, but, as you can see, I've been busy."

"The baby wasn't due for another week or more," James said, trying to excuse his tardiness.

"Oh, I know that, but babies have their own way of knowing when it's the right time to be born, and this is a growing community. There'll be many more babies, Doctor, and you'll be needing my help, I'm thinking."

"Perhaps," he said but his voice was gentler than he would have expected the day before. "My daughter is an excellent cook, Miss MacDonald. If you would do us the honour of joining us for lunch next Sunday, we could talk more about our respective roles."

Margaret inclined her head. "The honour would be mine, Doctor, but it is a long ride back to your farm and you must pass our home on the way. I'm sure my sister-in-law would be happy to offer you a late lunch now if you have time."

James reflected for a moment. He had seen all the patients who needed urgent attention. The only ones remaining were the Goldstein boy, who had broken his arm a few weeks earlier and was taking a long time to heal, and one of Captain Sims' horses. Both could wait a few more hours.

"I have time," he affirmed and told the Murrays where he would be if anyone came looking for him.

Neil had definitely been right. James reflected on that as he rode away. He liked Margaret and was sure that she liked him. She was very far from the stupid woman, full of peasant superstitions, whom he had been expecting. In fact, she had told him that, had she been born a man, she would have been a doctor.

"My husband was a doctor," she had said when they were drinking coffee after the cold meat and bread they had shared. "I met him when I was delivering a baby. Half the women in the town were with child and they were born faster than the doctors could keep up with them. Midwives were essential then."

"What made you become a midwife?" James asked.

"My mother and grandmother were midwives. Somewhere in the past, one of the women in our family was burned as a witch, but the others survived to pass on

commonsense to those of my generation. My sister would have been a midwife too but she married early and has too big a brood of her own."

"You have no children?" James asked.

"No, there wasn't time." He sensed that she wasn't telling the whole truth but didn't press the point: whatever it was, she would tell him when she wanted to and not before. "Robert was hanged six months after our marriage," she went on quietly.

"For what?" James asked, wondering how such a genteel woman could have been married to a man who had done something worthy of the death sentence. However unfair that sentence could sometimes be, it was no longer given for such petty offences as it had in the past.

"He spoke out against the King," she said sadly. "They said he had incited a riot and killed an officer of the Crown."

"Did he?" James asked.

"He spoke in a way which could have incited the riot, yes, but he killed no-one. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I couldn't stay in Scotland after he died, so I took my father's name back and came out here to join Malcolm." They sat in companionable silence for a while. "Have I shocked you, Doctor Campbell?"

"No," he said at once, knowing that, since she had confided in him, it was important for him to give her the same measure of trust. "My wife's brother was arrested for a similar crime. We tried to help him, Neil and I, but it was no use. They arrested him and accused me of aiding him. They had no proof but it was enough to make my patients mistrust me, that and the death of the young Laird, which I still maintain was not my fault."

"What happened?" she asked gently and he found himself telling her of the life he had almost forgotten, the young Laird who would have lived had it not been for the meddling of an old woman who thought she knew better than the doctor. "I see why your opinion of women like myself is so low," she said then. "Do not worry about me, Doctor. I know how to use herbs as medicine but I also know when to listen to someone with more knowledge than myself, and I'm willing to learn. The herbs and leaves are different here. I've already discovered that, and I've been talking to some of the older women who've learned their secrets from the Indians. I do use common sense for the most part, Doctor, but I'll only do so when you can't be there. Is that acceptable to you?"

"Very acceptable. Thank you."

"I tell you," Emma said emphatically, "they're definitely up to something."

"What could they be doing?" Rebecca asked her reasonably. "Neil <u>is</u> gone a lot but he says he's running errands for your father. I don't think I've seen him for nearly a week."

"Do you want to see him?" Emma asked bluntly.

Rebecca sighed. "Yes," she said, "I do want to see him. Neil is different from the other young men around here. Maybe it's because your father raised him to be a gentleman, I don't know. I only know that I like him and I want to see him."

"Has your father said anything else about marriage?" Emma asked, referring to the one time Sims had tried to marry his daughter off, and Neil had reacted like a bull faced with a red rag.

"No, and I don't think he will, but Harriet keeps saying little things, hints really, about how she met my father, and how my mother met him, and that ... well, I think she likes Neil. I don't think my father does but then he doesn't have to marry him, does he?"

"Do you want to marry Neil?" Emma asked.

"I don't know. I only know that I like him more than anyone else I've ever met, and I'm terribly afraid I have a rival."

"Who?"

"Margaret MacDonald."

"But she's nearly as old as Father."

"Harriet is a lot younger than my father," Rebecca pointed out.

"That's different."

"Is it? Margaret is educated and cultured, a real lady. Everyone likes her. I can't blame Neil for liking her too, can I?"

"I think," Emma said meaningfully, "we need to do something about Neil. We'll make him notice you."

James was far too tired to wait until the children were asleep before he could talk to Neil. Fortunately, he didn't have to. Neil was in the barn when he got home, grooming his horse. James took his own horse in there, preparing to rub him down before turning him loose in the paddock.

"I'll do that for you," Neil offered.

"No, it's no hardship. Besides, it helps me to relax."

"Bad day?" Neil asked.

"Bad enough, son. Still, none of my patients died, not even Sims' horse, and I met your Margaret."

"Did you like her?" Neil asked with a shy smile.

"Very much. We need more women like her out here. Neil? May I ask you something?"

"Yes, of course." Neil's tone was light but he was tense, as though he were expecting a question he didn't want to answer.

"Did you think I needed a friend like Margaret?"

"I thought you needed a friend, yes, but Margaret ..." He hesitated, unsure of his own thoughts, let alone how to relay them to his father. "I thought you would ... well, perhaps you and Margaret can be more than friends."

James smiled at the boy's discomfiture. It was none of his business, of course, but it had been done out of love, and from Neil's concern that James had left a woman he could have loved in Scotland. "Yes," he said with a smile which surprised his son. "Perhaps we can be more than friends. We'll have to wait and see, won't we?"

Emma couldn't help it: she liked Margaret. It made her feel terribly disloyal to Rebecca, and guilty about her plans to make Neil notice Rebecca, but she still couldn't help it. Margaret was one of the nicest people she had ever met.

"Still," she told Rebecca, when they met later on Sunday evening, "she is some kind of witch. She charms everyone she meets, including John, and Neil is totally besotted with her. We are going to have to take steps to make him notice you instead."

Over the next few weeks, James was busier than ever before. The hard winter had resulted in pregnancies among the majority of the women in the community, and he was constantly travelling to outlying farms, to tend pregnant women and care for sick children. He was almost always late for a birthing, generally arriving in time to hear that Margaret had done her job and delivered a healthy baby into the world. He was impressed with her skills, especially after she delivered not one but two breech babies, but he did wish he could see her rather than simply hear his patients sing her praises.

There were sick children on two of the farms near to the one where Margaret and her brother lived, and he sent Neil with medicine for Margaret to give to his patients when she visited them and he wasn't able to.

The harvest kept him busy, both at home and with the accidents which inevitably befell inexperienced farmers at such a time. There were no serious injuries but enough minor ones to keep him from having any leisure time, and from seeing Margaret. He heard of her often, and she sometimes reached a patient before he did,

but he never saw her.

"Ridiculous," he told himself, as he rode home from another near miss, "you're behaving like a lovesick young fool, James Campbell," but the thought made him smile and he quickened the horse's pace, determining to return home in time to help another lovesick young fool with the harvest.

Once the harvest was over, James was able to see Margaret occasionally, and he found he was looking forward to each visit with an intensity that reminded him of his courtship of his other Margaret. He sent Neil to see her too, with small gifts, or the loan of some book he had mentioned to her, as well as the return of books loaned to him, and Neil could find nothing ill to say about her.

"Does she talk about me a lot?" James asked one evening when they thought themselves alone in the kitchen.

"As often as I let her," Neil replied with a wicked grin. "I don't know much about these things, Father, but I think she's falling in love."

That was all Emma needed to hear. She slipped away to her own room, her mind racing furiously as she tried to decide what else could be done to make her brother notice her best friend. She fell asleep so late that she was irritable from lack of sleep all the next day, and, since James was away, took most of it out on Neil, which didn't improve his temper either. As soon as the essential chores were done, he was away, without telling her where, but she knew he had gone to see Margaret again.

"What *is* wrong with Emma?" James asked when he and Neil were working together a day or two later.

"Nothing save one of her schemes."

"Oh?" Father and son exchanged an understanding smile. "What bee does she have in her bonnet this time?"

"She wants me to notice Rebecca."

"Is it working?"

"It isn't necessary, Father."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I don't think I'm old enough to be a husband yet but, when I am, I intend to ask Rebecca to be my wife."

"You could have a long engagement, you know."

"No. I'd have to get Captain Sims used to the idea then. This way I shall spring it on him."

When the Murrays held a barn raising, Emma did everything in her power to get Rebecca and Neil together. Her plan seemed doomed to failure. Everywhere Neil went, James was with him and, wherever they both were, there also was Margaret. She supposed that Neil was getting their father used to the idea of his marrying someone so much older than himself, but both of them had been behaving very strangely lately, as though they were planning something she and John weren't meant to find out about, and it made her feel even more uneasy than Margaret's constant presence in Neil's life did. She supposed that a young man of Neil's age needed to feel close to his father, and grudgingly admitted that James might also need someone he could talk to about his hopes and fears, but she didn't like to feel excluded from either of their lives, and that was exactly how they were making her feel.

Neil waited until Emma was occupied elsewhere before seeking out Rebecca and asking her to go for a walk with him. It was a beautiful August evening and he felt at peace with everyone, including his sister. He and Rebecca walked and talked, and they even held hands for a while when they were out of sight of their elders, or at

least thought they were.

"You're serious then," James said when they were tending to their horses in the barn. "I saw you with Rebecca and it seems you need no help from your sister."

"I never have done," Neil confirmed. He gave his father a conspiratorial smile. "You know how I feel, Father. I think Rebecca feels the same way."

"Only *think*?" James asked softly.

"When I know," Neil responded, "then will be the time to talk of marriage."

The cooler weather of autumn brought something else. Rain swelled the rivers and streams, and the water brought a sickness with it. The Olsons lived the furthest from Logan's and were a solitary family, rarely joining in the social life of the other farms. When their cow sickened and died, no-one knew abut it until one of the children also died, and they were forced to call the Doctor they couldn't afford to save the other children. By then, it was too late: the sickness had spread to the river and to the food the Olsons had traded to the next two farms.

Margaret went to the Camerons to deliver a baby and found the proud father complaining of an illness. After examining him - and delivering the child safely - she rode straight to the Campbells, meeting James on the way.

"The Cameron baby?" he asked.

"A boy. Healthy for now. Frank Cameron is sick, Doctor. I think it's typhoid."

"Very probably," he agreed. "The Olsons have the sickness." Then he realised she had diagnosed the sickness correctly. "Have you had experience of typhoid, Miss MacDonald?"

"Yes, in Scotland."

"Thank Providence for that at least. I shall need all the help I can get. Go to your brother and tell him to make sure everyone knows what to do. I'll need to go home and collect more supplies."

"Your children ...," she began a little uncertainly.

"That's why I need to collect more supplies. I'll not put them in any danger."

The Campbell children didn't see their father while the fever raged. To keep them safe, he stayed away from the farm, seeing only his patients and their families. Margaret was a godsend to him in those days. She seemed tireless as she rode from farm to farm, ensuring that precautions were taken, and other ills treated, although she left the suspected typhoid cases for James and, every day, she travelled to the Olson farm to see him. She didn't have to be told to stay a safe distance away as he gave her instructions for the rest of his patients, those who didn't have the fever. He came to look forward to those visits. However tired he was, however many times he rode between the infected farms, he always went out to speak to her himself, and he always enjoyed that brief respite from the killer which was claiming so many of his friends.

At the beginning of the second month, the danger was almost passed. There had been no new cases for ten days and those who had caught the fever were either dead or well on the road to recovery. James was beginning to think that he could go home to his family when Margaret came with more bad news.

"Another one?" he asked when he saw her face.

"Another one," she confirmed.

"Who?"

"Harriet Sims."

"But how? Sims must be one of the most careful men in the county. He doesn't like me but he does what I tell him when it comes to medical matters."

"Harriet had been taking supplies to the sick: someone had to take them food. I thought she was only leaving the food outside but it seems she went inside the Muller place and helped nurse the children. You'd better go to her, Doctor."

"Right away." He was already packed, ready to go home, and the Olsons didn't need anything he could give them, just rest and good food. Later, when the community had had time to heal and to mourn, there would be barns to rebuild and livestock to be replaced, but there were other things to be attended to first. "How are you?" he asked. "I don't want you to be the next."

"There aren't any signs of typhoid," she assured him. "I force myself to check my whole body twice a day for signs of the spots. I *am* tired but there's no-one in the community who isn't tired now. When this is over, I shall sleep for a week."

"I only wish we could allow ourselves that luxury," he said with a smile.

"*I* can, Doctor Campbell. There are no babies due for at least another three months."

He smiled at that, as he was intended to. Go home and sleep," he told her. "Then I'd be grateful if you'd go to my family for a few days. If it is typhoid, Sims will want the children away from their stepmother, and my farm is closest. He won't like the idea of Neil in charge of his daughter."

"Understood," Margaret smiled. "I'll ask Mary McTavish to stay over. If she can't, then I will." She hadn't said, as he had thought she would, that there were other farms where the Sims children could stay. Perhaps she thought that Sims would want them nearby, or perhaps, like him, she thought that Rebecca's presence in his home would help Neil to make his mind up about the girl.

"Well?" Sims demanded when he came out of Harriet's room.

"I'm afraid it is typhoid." There was no sense in softening the words.

"Oh my God! The children ..."

"They must stay with my family, of course. I've already asked Margaret to arrange a chaperone for Rebecca."

"Good God, man! Do you think I'd think of that at a time like this?"

Despite the circumstances, James allowed himself a smile. "It's still a good idea," he said firmly. "I trust Neil implicitly but you know as well as I do what the wagging tongues are like in this community."

"Yes, yes, of course. Very thoughtful of you, Campbell." He wandered off to supervise Richard's packing.

Harriet wasn't desperately ill at first but then that is the nature of typhoid. Like many other illnesses, it starts slowly, with the patient merely feeling tired and unwell, with a slight fever. The second week would be the worst and James promised to spend as much of it as he could by her side. He slept at the Sims house but, during the day, he rode between the other farms, caring for his other patients and ensuring that there were no new cases. After the first night, when he slept in a chair, Sims moved a couch into Harriet's room for him but, although he used it, he didn't sleep well.

Either Emma or Rebecca brought fresh provisions every morning but James would not allow them near the house, and Sims made sure that his ruling was enforced. James himself never saw the girls to speak to. He was still at the farm when Emma arrived one morning but he merely watched her from the window, unable to speak to one of his children in the knowledge that he couldn't see the others.

Margaret arrived on the ninth morning. She was carrying a bag and looked as though she intended to stay.

"What are you doing here?" James asked.

"Giving you a rest," Margaret replied. "How is she?"

"I don't know. Mrs Olson lived this long and died at the end of the second week. Everyone else who came this far has survived, but I'm not sure she's strong enough. The fever's burning off what little food I can keep inside her."

"What are you doing?" she asked practically.

"Keeping her as warm as possible, to help the fever break, and giving her as much liquid as I can."

"Milk and water," Margaret observed, seeing the water jug and mug of unfinished milk beside him. "What else?"

"Sims made a mutton broth."

"He would." James wasn't sure how to take that. "Can you hold on a little longer, Doctor? I'll make her some chicken broth. Then I'll take over while you rest."

The broth smelled delicious. James realised when Margaret brought it in that he hadn't eaten for hours. Margaret obviously realised that too: she brought a second bowl for him and ordered him to eat it while she spooned some into Harriet's mouth. There was fresh bread too, although he suspected she had got that from Emma.

"That's enough for now," she said after a few spoonfuls. "Go and rest, Doctor. I'll call you if anything changes."

"All right." He reached out to touch Harriet's forehead for the thousandth time that day. "She doesn't seem any worse. That's a blessing. But the sheets will need to be changed again, and you should keep trying to

get that broth down her."

"I will," Margaret said patiently. "Now go."

James went.

He woke about five hours later, wondering where he was and why it was so light. He had become so used to catching catnaps in Harriet's room that he had almost forgotten what a bed - and the daylight - looked like. Splashing cold water on his face in lieu of a proper wash, he went back to his patient. Margaret was still sitting by the bed. She stood up when he came in.

"Her fever's higher," she said. "Otherwise there's no change."

"Pulse and heartbeat?" he asked, reaching for the first.

"Erratic. I thought her pulse was getting stronger at one point but it didn't last. I was going to wake you in a few minutes anyhow. I think she's approaching the crisis."

"I've thought that for two days," he said wearily. "Thank you, Margaret. I'll sit with her now. Is there any of your excellent broth left?"

"No, but Emma left some fresh food outside an hour ago. I'll see what there is, and then I can make some more broth."

She brought him bread and cheese, with the promise of ham and eggs for lunch if she could persuade Captain Sims to collect the eggs, and some of Emma's beef tea for Harriet. He got very little of it down her, and decided to wait a while before trying again. The next couple of times he was a little more successful but he could do nothing about her fever, which continued to rage, nor to reassure Sims, who was trying not to be a nuisance but wasn't succeeding very well.

Margaret woke after only three hours' sleep and set about preparing food for the men and fresh broth for Harriet, but Harriet's fever was worsening and it proved impossible to get more than a few drops down her throat. James gve up the effort when she started to toss and turn violently.

"What's happening?" Sims demanded.

"She's approaching the crisis," James answered, rather more abruptly than he had intended. He had, after all, lost his own wife to sickness and could understand what the man was going through. "When this stage is over, we'll know one way or another." He ruthlessly suppressed the memory of the little boy who had fought through the fever but died in his sleep the following morning. Sims muttered an apology and wandered off to find something else to occupy his mind.

"What can I do?" Margaret asked.

"Talk to me and stop me thinking about the Muller boy."

"I was hoping you'd say that," she said, sitting down on the opposite side of the bed and starting to unroll bandages. "These are fairly supple, Doctor. She'll suffer less injury if we tie her down."

"Good idea. The marks from these will fade: broken bones are a complication we don't need."

They took turns at holding Harriet still and mopping her brow. Time had no real meaning for them as they watched and waited. And, towards the end, when dawn was beginning to paint the sky, Margaret felt herself falling asleep. He fought it for a while but she was exhausted and the fight proved impossible to win. James wrapped a blanket round her - any excuse to touch her - and left her to sleep.

Sims came back into the room then. "Remarkable woman," he said, nodding his head towards Margaret.

"Yes, she is." Despite his fatigue, James allowed himself a fond smile. "Very like your Harriet, Sims."

"Yes, yes, quite." Sims was far too worried about Harriet to read anything into James's words. It was doubtful whether he had even heard them. "Campbell, I'm grateful to you for getting my children out of the way."

"I'm a father too," James reminded him. He had a sudden vision of holding Emma the way he was having to hold Harriet. If Harriet died, he could at least say that he had done everything possble to save her. If it was Emma - or either of his sons - he knew he wouldn't be able to forgive himself.

"You were in another world for a moment," Sims said. "What were you thinking about?"

"My children. I was thinking about nursing them through this."

"Thank God you don't have to. You've taken every reasonble precaution, man: your children won't come to any harm."

"Let's hope so."

"If God has any regard for you," Margaret said softly, "he'll spare your children, James Campbell. That's your reward for the care you've given to others."

"I thought that once before," James said. His voice sounded wistful, far away. "He saved my children then but took my Margaret instead."

"What was it?" Sims asked. "Typhoid?"

"No, influenza. Neil nearly died: his mother did die."

"I lost my first wife in childbirth," Sims said. "The child died with her but, thank God, I have Richard. If my son died ..."

"You'd go on living," Margaret said. "You have to." She gave a huge, ragged sigh. "My David died from typhoid."

"I didn't realise you had a child," James said.

"I couldn't tell anyone, James: the memory was too painful. He died because Robert was in prison."

"Surely there were other doctors," Sims said.

"It wasn't a doctor David wanted, Captain: It was his father. I was married to Robert for ten years, I knew how to nurse typhoid patients, but David kept crying for his father, and Robert couldn't come. David died the morning the English hanged his father." She didn't cry, not until James put his arms round her. "It's a terrible thing to lose a husband," she said then. "You're both widowers - you must understand that - but it's far worse to lose a child and to know that, even if you have another child, he will never be the same, never can be the same because that child's father will never give you another child. Dr Campbell, I'm sorry: I didn't mean to cry.

"Hush," he said gently, "you're exhausted. There's no harm in it," bu his arms ached to hold her under different circumstances, and he knew that Sims, at least, understood.

"Your sons," she said, "they're so alive. David wasn't any older than John when he died. He was fair-haired, like Neil. I've seen so much death recently - we both have - but we have to go on living, and we have to rejoice that others can do the same. At least you're alive, Doctor. When Robert died, there wasn't another doctor for thirty miles and the only way to make the journey was on foot. There was a bad

storm too. It lasted for days. The doctor came when it ended but he was too late, for David and for most of the others."

"I suppose," James said, "that he was tending some minor ailment elsewhere."

"Aye. The Laird's daughter was bearing her first child. You know how it is, Doctor. Sometimes a first child seems to be forever in coming, but she was a strong healthy girl and the birth itself was easy enough. Her own grandmother said that and she never trusted midwives."

"The lairds have a lot to answer for," James said softly.

"Aye, they do that, but I understand well enough why the doctor could not leave his patron to doctor peasants who could not afford his fees. Understand but not forgive." She suddenly realised where she was. "I've stopped crying, Dr Campbell. You can let me go now."

"This isn't exactly unpleasant," he murmured so that only she could hear but he moved away anyway, reaching out almost automatically to touch Harriet's forehead. She reacted as though his touch was a signal, giving one last, shuddering moan and then lying still.

"What is it?" Sims demanded. "What's happening?"

"It's over," James answered, his whole expression telling Sims that he could not possibly mean the worst had happened. "She's past the crisis," he went on. "Her pulse and heartbeat are strong. I really think she's going to make it. I'd like to stay with her for al ittle while, just to be sure, but the danger's passed."

By the evening, Harriet was sleeping peacefully. She had woken enough to drink some of Margaret's broth, and gone straight back to sleep.

"Why don't you go home?" Margaret said. "You're tired, Docor, and a night in your own bed will do you more good than sleeping here will. Besides," she added with a smile, "Rebecca and Richard will want to know how their stepmother is, and I'm sure your children will be overjoyed to see you. Go on. Captain Sims can fetch you if we need you."

"You need to rest too, Miss MacDonald."

"I know. When you come back, I'll go home and stay in bed for a week." She walked him out to his horse and wtched while he saddled the gelding. "Doctor," she said, as he was about to mount, "thank you." He nodded his understanding but, once he was mounted, he leaned down to touch her face in a caress he would never normally have given to anyone save Emma. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said and was away.

For a long time, Margaret stood wathcing him. Even after he was gone from her sight, she stood there, thinking.

"He's a good man," Sims said when she went back inside.

"I know that, Captain. I knew that before I'd even met him, thanks to my brother's letters. I told myself I'd find a man in the Canadas, but I was expecting a man I could be comfortable with, a companion for my old age. I didn't expect to fall in love."

"My dear Miss MacDonald, James Campbell is in love with you and you with him. The sooner you both realise that, the better for all of us."

"It's too soon, Captain, for both of us."

"For you perhaps but Campbell's wife died several years ago."

"I wasn't talking about his wife," Margaret said. She busied herself with Harriet's comfort for a while. "There was a woman in Scotland. Had they been together longer, he would have married her, but he had his children to consider, and Neil would never have been happy in Scotland." She stopped her fussing for a moment. "I'll tell you something, Captain. I told myself I would marry rather than be a burden to my brother but, if James cannot forget, if God does not intend us to be together, then this community will soon be thinking of me as a spinster who will never marry."

"A widow, surely."

"Only you and the Campbells know that I was married. Aside from my own family, that is. I shall be a wife or a spinster, Captain, but never a widow to be talked about and pitied."

Emma and John came running out to meet their father. He hugged them both, enjoying the vitality of their warm bodies against him. Neil was inside the cabin, with Rebecca in his arms, but the girl had obviously been crying and James knew the boy was comforting her rather than taking advantage of the situation. He went over to touch Neil's shoulder, letting him know that he understood, before he spoke to the girl.

"How is my stepmother?" Rebecca asked. She was fighting desperately to keep calm, as though she expected the worst and wouldn't accept it. There were, after all, only two reasons he would have come home, and both of them meant he could do no more for Harriet.

"She'll be fine," James assured her. "Margaret's staying with her but she's well past the crisis. I came home to sleep."

"Are *you* all right?" Neil asked gently.

"I'm tired, son, that's all." He studied Neil's face for a moment. "You look tired too."

"I am," Neil admitted. "I've been delivering medicine for you and trying to manage the farm without you, but then everyone in the community must be in much the same state."

"Very probably," James agreed. "Don't let me sleep too long, Neil. I want to check on my other patients tonight."

It was twilight when Neil roused him, a little later than he had expected, but then he knew Neil only had his best interests at heart. Neil had brought him a mug of coffee and he sat on the bed while James drank it, glad of the chance to forget his chores for a few minutes and, understanding that, his father took his time over the coffee, letting it cool before he drank it.

"There's food downstairs," Neil said by way of conversation, although they had no need of it, the companionable silence had been enjoyable for both of them. "Emma says you're to eat before you go out, and she'll leave something on the stove for when you come home."

"That does sound good," James admitted. "Captain Sims is a terrible cook."

Neil laughed. "I'm sure he'd like to hear that. Father, speaking of Captain Sims, I want to talk to you. Rebecca and Emma are out picking berries for supper and I ..."

"You want to talk to me while they're out."

"Yes. Father, when you came home, what we were doing, it wasn't what it seemed."

"Oh, I know that, Neil. If it had been, I'd have spoken quite sharply to both of you. Someone Rebecca loves was in danger of losing her life. At such a time, rules can be bent, if not broken. Now. What do you want to talk to me about? Has living with Rebecca changed your mind, son?"

"No," Neil answered slowly, "quite the opposite. Emma thinks I'm deliberately ignoring Rebecca but I'm not. I'm afraid that, if I talk to her too much, I'll want to touch her, to kiss her and, if I do touch her, I won't be able to stop. I know how I *should* behave but I can't guarantee that I *will*. Did you ever feel that way abaout Mother?"

"Often. We had to postpone our marriage until I'd finished my medical studies, don't forget. Have you spoken to Rebecca?"

"No. I couldn't, not with Mrs Sims so ill."

"Do you intend to speak to her?"

"Yes."

"Then I would advise you to wait a few days before speaking to Captain Sims."

"Of course, Father. He must be as tired as you are."

"Not for that reason, son. I intend to ask Margaret to marry me. She may refuse, of course, so I'll ask you not to speak of it until I've asked her but, if she accepts, it should help your cause. Sims regards us Campbells as well below him in rank, and he'll use any excuse to refuse you. Another woman in this house might make him look more favourably on you."

"True enough," Neil accepted. "Father, do you feel the way I do? Happy and excited one moment, and plunged into terrible despair the next?"

"I did when I was courting your mother. I'm older and wiser now, Neil, but yes, I feel the same way.

Neil gathered up the now empty mug and prepared to leave. He was at the door when James called him back. "Neil? My marriage to Margaret. That's what you intended all along, isn't?"

"Of course," Neil replied with a smile. "Have you spoken to Margaret?"

"No, but I will at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, I expect you to keep this to yourself, Neil."

"I will," Neil promised. He came back to the bed. "I'm ... well, thank you for telling me, Father."

James smiled. Then he reached out to touch Neil's hair in a light caress. "There are times," he said, "when I remember you as a tiny baby and wonder where the years went, but you're a grown man now, son, and you deserve to be treated as such. You've shared your feelings with me; it's only right that I share mine with you."

Neil was silent, as though he didn't know what to say but, later on, when James had eaten and was saddling his horse, he said, "Sometimes I think we're more than father and son. I love you because you're my father, and because of the years we've spent together, learning to love each other, but it's not only that. We're friends too. We talk to each other in a way that most of my friends can't copy with their own fathers. I think ... well, if you weren't my father, I'd like you anyway, as a friend."

It was James's turn to be silent. At last, he said, "I think that was the highest compliment I've ever been paid. Now, Neil, we have some planning to do. We can't bring two wives to that cabin. It will have to be enlarged to some considerable extent."

"I've thought about that," Neil admitted. "Emma won't mind having Margaret live in her home, not once she gets used to it, but I don't know how three women will live together so easily. Perhaps Rebecca and I could build our own house, close to yours but far enough apart that we would be two separate families. It wouldn't have to be a big house, not at first, and we could add extra rooms when we needed them. What do you think?"

"I think it's an excellent idea. I should have known you'd be planning well ahead."

"Why?"

"You planned the farm, Neil. I only helped you work it. The planning was all yours. If you manage your family only half as well, you'll be very happy."

James hardly saw Margaret during the next week. "This is becoming a habit," he told himself one evening as he rode over to the Sims farm. "Tomorrow I'll go and see her, whatever happens."

Neil was already at the farm, although he was preparing to leave as his father arrived. "Rebecca left some books at the cabin," he explained. "I brought them over. It was a convenient excuse," he added, with a sideways glimpse at Sims, but it was left to Sims to explain.

"I'll say one thing for your boy," he said when Harriet had been examined and pronounced fit enough to get out of bed. "He knows how a gentleman should behave.

You know he asked my permission to court Rebecca, of course."

"No, I didn't, although I knew he intended to. That's why he came, I suppose."

"Yes. I gave it, of course. He's not wealthy but he's a hard worker and a gentleman, and he respects his elders. Besides, the damn fool girl is besotted with him."

Because of the epidemic, James's other patients had been neglected. He spent the next two days going from one farm to the next, catching up on his regular duties and, when that was done, Neil needed his help on the farm, so it was five days before he thought he would have time to see Margaret. As it was, he saw her at the Walkers, when he arrived - for once - in time to deliver Mrs Walker of her first daughter. It was late evening by the time the child was born but he and Margaret both stayed, knowing that they could be found easily enough if anyone else was sick, and knowing too that, after the deaths of the last few weeks, the birth of a new life would be as refreshing to their weary minds as the Autumn rain to a sun parched field. The Walkers insisted on their staying for supper and, while the proud father was preparing something, they went outside to let the coolness of the evening breeze revive them.

"I've been meaning to come and visit you," James said when every other topic had been exhausted.

"And I you," Margaret told him. "We must come to some arrangement about shared fees. Our patients cannot afford to pay both of us. I thought perhaps you could submit accounts and then pay me from the money - or goods - you receive."

"That wasn't quite what I had in mind, Miss MacDonald, although my proposal would settle any differences we might have in that area. Emma has been interested for some time in assisting me in my work. A midwife's training would be a good basis for her. Could we arrange a suitable fee for your time?"

"Well now, Doctor Campbell, that depends."

"On what?"

"On whether you ask me something else as well. I'm not a wealthy woman, Doctor, but there are others in this community who would be interested in me purely because of the money I do have."

"Damn it, woman, I'm not interested in your money."

"It would be enough to send John away to school."

"No, I can't do that, not after the fuss I've made about getting a schoolhouse and a teacher."

"Then I could pay the teacher's salary. Canada is not that different from Scotland," Margaret went on. "Once a woman marries, her money passes to her husband. I would rather not squander what little I have on a man who would drink it away. James, do I have to ask you?"

"I'll not marry any woman that has to ask me," he said with a smile. His apprehension was suddenly gone. If Margaret were this keen to hear the question, then there was no way she could refuse him. "The first time," he said with a faraway expression in his eyes, "I proposed on my knees. I trust that will not be necessary this time. I'm not a wealthy man, Margaret, but you know that already, and you know I have a family to consider. You do not know that my family's farm is not wholly mine. I bought the land in my name because my children were so young but Neil has more right to the land now than I do. Half the farm is in his name and I have made a Will leaving the other half to John and Emma. I do not intend to change that Will, save to ask my sons to make provision for you. You should know that before I ask you anything."

"I shouldn't be surprised," she said, "not knowing you as well as I do, but I am surprised. Does Neil know?"

"No. I shall tell him - it will help him win his battle with Sims - but not yet."

"I understand that. There's a right time for everything. I thought this was the right time for us."

"It is," James assured her. "Margaret, this is stupid. Will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?"

"Left to your own devices," she said with a smile, "you'd have taken six months to ask me. Yes, James, I'll marry you but there are things I must tell you first."

"There's no need, Margaret.

"There is, James. I came to Canada because there was nothing left for me in Scotland. My heart was broken twice over but I was determined not to be a burden on my brother. I decided to marry a man I could be comfortable with, someone who needed companionship and a mother for his children. You changed that resolve, James Campbell. I'll be a companion to you, and I'll care for your children, but it will go far deeper with me. God help me, James Campbell, I'm as much in love with you as I was Robert when I gave him the same answer."

"I'm happy to know that, my dear." James reached out to stroke her face and then, greatly daring, bent his head to kiss her cheek. "Neil asked me," he said then, "if I felt the same way about you as he does about Rebecca. I do, Margaret. I never gave a thought to companionship or a mother for John and Emma. I thought of them afterwards, of course, and I'd never do anything to hurt them, but you bewitched me, Margaret. We've talked of honour, but honour has nothing to do with it. I love you too, Margaret, and I find myself impatient for our wedding night."

"I think," Margaret said with a smile, "that it's a good thing I'm a widow and not an innocent young girl. And I am also thinking that we should not allow ourselves to be alone like this, or I will forget that I am a *respectable* widow."

There was such an air of expectancy in the cabin that Emma could feel it. She was annoyed that John said he couldn't, and even more annoyed by Neil, who seemed to be causing it. She wondered what had happened to make her brother so happy, and where her father was. When they heard his horse outside, Neil was out of the cabin without an explanation, running forward to meet his father as though something urgent had happened.

"What is it?" James asked. "Does someone else need my services?"

"No, but I have something to tell you."

"Good, because I have something to tell you." James swung down from his horse and let Neil take the rein, preparing to lead the gelding to the barn. "Margaret helped me deliver the Walker baby and it gave us a chance to talk. I asked Margaret to be my wife, Neil. She said *yes*."

"Good," Neil responded, his eyes dancing with both pleasure and excitement.

"*Good?*" his father demanded. "*Good!* Is that all you can say?"

"For now, yes. Rebecca also said *yes*."

James looked at him for a long, timeless moment. They had talked about Rebecca often enough, but he had thought this moment was a long way off. There was no denying it now: his eldest child was now a man and would soon make him a grandfather. It was high time he took another wife of his own!

"Aren't you pleased?" Neil asked a trifle hesitantly.

"Yes, son, I'm pleased. For a moment there, I was seeing you as you were when I brought you into the world. I hadn't fully appreciated how grown up you are."

It happened suddenly then. Neither of them could hold in his joy any more and they hugged each other as though they would never let go, laughing and crying at the same time, and congratulating each other as though they had done something wonderful instead of merely asking two women to be their wives. James finally settled down enough to simply hold Neil close to him and enjoy the feel of another human being in his arms with no fear of anyone misinterpreting their embrace, or of having to stay

within the bounds of respectable, honourable behaviour.

"Well," he said, when they parted, "hadn't we better tell the children?"

"Yes," Neil said, "I suppose we had." Then he realised what James had said. Always before, his brother and sister had been *John and Emma*; now they were *the children*. He must have grown up: his father was thinking of him as an adult.

Emma saw the hug and was hurt by it. Neil had obviously been sharing some wonderful secret with their father, something both of them had elected to keep from her. She pretended to get on with her sewing but she was too worked up to concentrate. It just wasn't fair. Neil never noticed Rebecca, and their father was keeping secrets from her. She wondered where it would end, but her wondering didn't last long, for both the Campbell men came into the kitchen a few minutes later.

"Where's John?" James asked. "Neil and I have something to tell you both."

"In his room," Emma answered sullenly. "Neil sent him there for swearing."

"He can come down," Neil said good naturedly. "I'll call him." He had said earlier that John would have to spend the whole evening there and, if he decided to tell James, would probably have to miss supper as well, but he was obviously in too good a mood to remember his threats.

"I have something very important to tell you," James said when his family were all gathered in the kitchen. "Neil already knows but I didn't know how to break the news to you two so I left it until I was sure that the news I was giving you would be the right news. Earlier today, I asked Margaret to be my wife."

"You," Emma said slowly and it suddenly fell into place. Neil hadn't wanted Margaret for himself: he had been running errands for James and doing his best to ensure that Margaret heard only the good things about their father. "Oh dear," she said uncertainly.

"We know what you were doing," Neil told her with a smile, "and it wasn't necessary, however well intentioned it was. I'm going to be married too, Emma, to Rebecca."

As their bodies recovered from the ravages of the sickness, the farmers took stock of their situation. On the worst hit farms, barns and animals had been burned and had to be replaced. Livestock were traded, and animals mated with those from other farms, while their owners rebuilt their barns. It seemed that there was a barnraising every week, with a barndance to flatten the earth. The young people never tired and it seemed to James that Neil had never been happier. He was deeply in love with Rebecca and sought her company in every moment he could be spared from the farm. Barndances tended to be a little too wild for Captain Sims to approve of them, but James had never forbidden his children the social life of the community. He had raised them as the children of a gentleman but the new country had changed his opinons of a lot of things and, exciting and unladylike though they were, he approved of the barndances and the chance for the community to relax together, and Sims had reluctantly allowed Rebecca to accompany Emma to them.

The Mullers had lost more than any other family, but they held a barnraising all the same, with the dance afterwards.

"We lost our son and our daughter," Mrs Muller explained, "but we must rejoice that their little ones were spared, and that our neighbours did not lose their children."

Malcolm MacDonald heartily approved of the community working and playing together. He had been a carpenter before his conversion, and often used his skills as an opening, a way to begin a conversation about Someone else who had been a carpenter. He attended every barnraising, using his skills where he could, and Margaret went with him to play with the smaller children and help the other women with the refreshments. Being a widow with no children of her own to distract her, she was

also in demand as a chaperone for the dances, which her brother attended as minister and caller. He would bless the dance in his capacity as minister and then endeavour to teach everyone some of the more complicated Scottish dances. He never danced himself, except with his wife when he demonstrated the steps, and he always closed the dance with a prayer.

At the Mullers' barndance, Margaret was seen to have a distraction. Although she arrived with her brother, she rarely left the doctor's side and the older women shook their heads as they looked at her.

"Like a young girl," one woman said disapprovingly. "And her a respectable widow too."

"Yon doctor's no better," another said. "As besotted with her as his son is with the Sims girl. Just look at the way they're dancing!" For James had Margaret by both hands and was spinning her around as though they were both in their early teens.

As the evening wore on, the dancing came to a halt while the partygoers ate the food that was left from the barnraising and drank gallons of lemonade and cider. While all was quiet, Malcolm saw his chance to make an announcement.

"I have some good news," he said when he had everyone's attention. "One of the great joys of a minister's life is to watch his flock as they go about their lives, as they live and love, and raise their children. Two of my flock have decided that they love each other enough to marry and have children of their own." It was no surprise to anyone when he went on to name Neil and Rebecca. "It is also a pleasure," he said then, "to watch while widows and widowers fall in love again, sometimes withut truly knowing their own minds. I'm sure you all know my sister, Margaret. It gives me great pleasure to tell you tonight that Margaret is to marry Dr Campbell."

James and Margaret were married three weeks after the Mullers' barndance. Three days later, Sims gave his permission for Neil to name a day for his own wedding. That, of course, was to be the biggest wedding the community had ever seen and Margaret actually enjoyed helping Harriet to organise it, while the men were building a second cabin for Neil to take his new bride to.

Two days before Neil's wedding, Margaret was helping him hang curtains in his new home when she felt suddenly dizzy. Neil caught her before she fell but she insisted that she was all right and wouldn't let him fetch his father, who was treating a sick cow on one of the other farms. He watched her carefully for the rest of the day and, when she announced her intention to ride to Logan's, insisted on driving her there.

"I've been riding this county since I arrived," she told him firmly but it was no use: Neil was every bit as persuasive as his father when he wanted to be and could not be moved.

"We will need supplies in a day or so," he told her, "and we have the money to pay for them, so I might as well buy them today. Besides, Father is expecting new medical supplies. They might have arrived."

Margaret stayed inside the roadhouse while he loaded the wagon. When he went in to tell her he was ready to leave, she was sitting down while Gabriel fussed over her.

"She says she feels sick," he told Neil. "Where is your father?"

"I do not need James," Margaret said firmly. "It's women's troubles, nothing more. Neil, will you take me home please? I promise I'll tell your father that I'm not ... well." The stumble over the last word was deliberate, Gabriel was sure of that, but Neil hadn't appeared to notice, so he said nothing beyond the fact that Margaret should rest a little before her stepson took her home.

"I agree," Neil said. "Father won't thank me if I make you worse by driving you home."

James chose that moment to walk in the door. The look of relief on Neil's face told him that someone was ill but not who.

"It's Margaret," Neil told him. "She's sick but she won't admit it."

"I am not sick," Margaret said. She stood up. "James, will you please take me outside: the fresh air will do me good."

"Aye, of course." He took her arm and led her to the door, almost certain that she merely felt ill because of her monthly cycle, but wanting a word of reassurance, which she could not give him in front of others, of course. "Is it women's troubles?" he asked sympathetically when hey were out in the open.

"No. Thank God I have never suffered that way as some women do. I am merely a woman who has been married for three months and has done her wifely duty."

"You mean ..." he began.

"Yes, James, I'm expecting your child."

Neil couldn't remember seeing his father so happy. He came back into the roadhouse with his arm round Margaret and a huge smile on his face.

"Is Margaret pregnant?" Neil asked then, the other men having suggested that her illness was merely pregnancy, and his father's expression suggesting that they were right.

"Yes," James answered simply. "It seems that I will be a father again before you make me a grandfather. And I'm thinking that Emma will be able to practice her new skills on the delivery of her own brother or sister, as well as the nieces and nephews you promised her."

Neil came to him then, giving him a huge hug before doing the same to Margaret. "That's wonderful news," he said. "I'm so happy for you."

James smiled as he put an arm round each of them. "You'd be happy for anyone right now," he observed. "Thank you, Neil. Your good wishes mean a lot now. I hope you'll soon be feeling the way I feel now."

Neil gave him a shy smile. "I hope so too, Father. Did you feel this way when Mother told you she was expecting me?"

"No," James told him honestly, "I didn't. I think I was more afraid than anything else, afraid that I'd be a bad father, or not know how to raise my sons. I've made mistakes, I'll admit that, but this child will benefit from those mistakes and from what I've learned from raising the three of you. But it chiefly isn't the same because I didn't have a grown up son then. This time, I shall look at my child and know that he can turn into as fine a man as his brother is."

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Grounded, I miss the feel of his hands - firm yet gentle, kind yet commanding - and the sound of his voice as he coaxes me through my paces. I love to listen to his pilots' prayer and to hear him defend me against cruel remarks. I may be a hulk of metal and wires, but he understands that I have a heart and soul, and that, like any lady, I will respond to love and kindness.

I will take him to dizzying heights if that is his wish. I will stop bullets for him with my body though they rip and tear through me. I will serve him to my last oil-spluttering gasp, or until my welding splits apart and I turn into a fireball, for I love him and by then I will have done all I can for him, and it will be time to rest.

SHERWOOD DOGGEREL
(OR: The Lost Ballad)

by Rowena Sayer

'Twas Christmas Day in the forest.
The outlaws' glade was bedecked
With holly and ivy and garlands.
Their noses were all turning red.

Herne showed up in his antlers.
Said he couldn't afford Santa Claus
As well as the eight prancing reindeer,
So he'd crawl around on all fours!

Will, amidst much complaining,
Into a red suit was pressed.
Appropriate for one who's named Scarlet,
As Santa he found himself dressed.

Tuck - his stomach was grumbling.
For the feast he just couldn't wait.
Swan pasties and venison cutlets,
Shame they knew nothing about cake!

A silver arrow was sent to our Robin,
In whose defence he just couldn't rest.
Tho' really he needn't have worried,
'Twas TV FX at their best!

Little John, the gentlest of giants,
Was given a new staff of wood.
And the long and the short of this story
Is that his fighting is now twice as good.

Nasir wasn't sure about Christmas,
Coming from lands faraway,
Yet enjoyed all the strange celebrations
On this, the most happy, of days.

Marion was blissfully happy,
Outlawed, yet carefree, content.
Revelling in seasonal frolics,
She knew it was all heaven sent.

Much was given a new reed pipe
And on it played many a fine tune,
Through the trees everyone danced and cavorted
Then sat down to eat around noon.

Alan and Mildred his sweetheart
Joined the outlaws for the day.
Their charger had run off to new pastures
And so they had walked all the way.

Wickham village's Christmas was merry,
For Robin and his friends had made sure,
That some monks in their monastery haven
Had distributed food to the poor.

The castle was lit up so brightly
With fiery candles, score upon score.
The table was heavily laden.
There were no seasonal thoughts for the poor.

The sheriff's stocking was completely empty.
Santa the poor boy had forgot.
But when ordered to return to the chamber,
Replied loudly, "No, I will not!"

Sir Guy really did not like Christmas.
He found that the frolicsome fun
Got in the way of his hunting,
And watching his enemies run.

For Hugo the season had to be solemn.
On his knees he was, praying all day,
Blessing the poor and the suffering,
At the same time, giving nothing away.

Deep in the Nottingham dungeons
The guards of the mead had made free.
Arthur and his friend were a-singing
Wassail to you, and good health to me.

The king's Christmas turned out to be dismal.
The details I'm not filling in.
If you want to know anything further
Read 'King John's Christmas' by Alan A Milne.

And there it is, one and all, now you have it,
A picture of this season festive,
Whilst Nottingham folks like receiving,
Those in the forest know 'tis more blessed to give.

ALL OUR HEROES

by Rowena Sayer

"The American government are getting worried about the increased activity on an estate somewhere deep in the heart of the country. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to find out what is going on. This tape will self-destruct in five seconds."

(Fizzle! Pfff! Splutter! Cough! How come Jim Phelps never gets a faceful of acrid smoke when his tape self-destructs?)

Now are the team ready? A more blood-curdling lot it would be hard to find; they'd strike terror into the heart of the staunchest actor ..... I mean spy ..... and they're all armed to the teeth with autograph books and pens ..... sorry, rifles and hand guns!! Now don't get carried away you lot, remember this is a top secret reconnaissance mission. First hurdle - the twelve foot wall - we don't have any twelve foot people or even pole vaulters with us so we'll just have to use our initiative! Where's the ladder? Hey there! Wait a minute! I'm the leader of this team so I'm going up first. Don't argue, I'm going!

Well here I am on top of the wall ..... er, did anyone remember to bring the parachutes? What do you mean jump, its only twelve foot high? YOU aren't up here I am! Mind you the view's lovely ..... I think I'll stay up here and ..... oh you've decided to come up and join me, have you? Well in that case you can jump first! Aaaargh .....! I suppose you think that's funny! I could have broken my leg! Yes, I know I didn't, but that's not the point - I could have! Honestly some people have no respect for their leaders!

So, here we are, pussyfooting our way around the trees in the garden and up to the house. Theredon't appear to be any booby traps or surveillance equipment, but one never knows so we're keeping a low profile! (I've always wondered why people creep around sideways when watching houses, showing off their profiles, haven't you?) Suddenly the patio opens out before us and we melt into the shadows of trees, bushes and daisies - whatever cover is available. What's that small gale blowing around us? A pink helicopter? Don't be silly, who's ever heard of a pink helicopter? Next you'll be telling me you've seen flying elephants!

Hello there's some movement in the house. Yes the doors are being flung open and the occupants are pouring out. They're all very familiar to us from the files and photos we keep in our bedrooms .....er, offices. Out come the binoculars so we can keep a close watch on the goings on of this motley group. The party is being presided over by Judge Hardcastle who seems to have everything well organised. (No you can't ask him for a drink of water, keep quiet!) What's that screech of tyres and smell of burning rubber? Oh, its just Skid McCormick arriving in his custom built car - late as usual and flashy with it. (Cough! Choke!) I think I'll move away from the drive just in case anyone else arrives late. Help, the dust raised by Skid's car is suffocating! Mind you there's no contest between that car and KITT which is already parked outside the house.

Hmm, talking of KITT, has anyone seen Michael Knight or Devon? You have? Where? Over by the pool? Oh yes I see them lurking there with the Simon brothers (plus dog!) And isn't that Remington Steele beside the geraniums, glass of wine in hand? Hmmm dreamy! Oh sorry, this is supposed to be an objective observation. (No I can't see what wine he's drinking from here, but he's certainly enjoying it).

Ah the water's obviously pleasant and both Sonny Crockett and Templeton Peck are taking full advantage of the pool. (We didn't bring our swimming costumes you idiot! No you can't just go in anyway!) Who's that in the wet suit? Jack Striker? Can't be! I thought he gave all that up when he started modelling. You're right. It is Jack! I bet Dani is jealous at being left behind. Oh, and I've just spotted BA and Tubbs having a quiet chat in the shade of that yew tree over there - hope our camouflage is as good as theirs! And is that Kojak sunbathing? Oops no, it's just an upturned flower tub!

Murdock is helping the judge serve the guests. He's pretending to be an English butler, (stop giggling they'll hear you), and very good he is too. I can't see Hannibal at the moment, but there's a very strange person lurking in the house. Oh it's all right it's the Greatest American Hero, although I must admit I'm not surprised he's a little reluctant to come out and mix considering the clothes he's wearing. Ah Hannibal's gone over to talk to him - ever thoughtful is our Colonel Smith. And Illya and Napoleon are skulking amongst the rose bushes near the door, what a suspicious pair they look!

There seems to be some sort of police convention being held round the barbecue. Wow that smell is making me feel really hungry. Let's see who's there. Well Starsky and Hutch are supervising the sausages whilst Hooker and Romano are splitting open the rolls. Dan Robbins and Steve Keller are standing at the table preparing the kebabs, and in the background McGarrett and Danno are garnishing the hamburgers (yum, yum). (No I don't suppose they'll cancel your parking tickets - no, not even if you ask them nicely!) And who are these arriving late, running across the back lawns? Nick, Cody and Boz? Yes I thought someone was missing from this little get-together - and okay I believe you, it was a pink helicopter!

This is all beginning to look very interesting. You know it suddenly strikes me that someone has either got a highly trained private army, or, the gorgeous male equivalent of a harem! Hmm, this is one piece of information that the US government isn't going to get! Well good luck to them in all their enterprises, and may they keep our lives from getting dull! Hey come back here you lot, we're supposed to be undercover! Look at them! Oh well, you know what they say, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, so I'm signing off! Byeeeeee!

DON'T CRY FOR ME

by Rowena Sayer.

"That's suicidal; you'd be throwing your life away needlessly," the Commander of the Galactica pointed out quietly to the angry young man in front of him.

"And why shouldn't I?" that individual snapped back. "After all my father threw his life away needlessly!" The moment he'd spoken, Troy regretted it. Adama's face was full of pain but he wasn't ready to apologise, not yet, and so, full of anger, frustration and despair he left the room.

Adama watched the door slide to behind his grandson. He ached for the young man, not knowing how to help him, and he ached with his own loss. The pain he felt at having asked Apollo to fly that mission would remain with him until he died. He could have chosen any of Blue Squadron for that task, any of that new group of young warriors who were so quickly filling the places left by the likes of Boomer, Jolly and Sheba. He shook his head sadly, pushing the thought away, knowing that Apollo would never have agreed, never have let anyone else do what he wasn't prepared to tackle himself. Glancing at the likeness of the captain on his desk, Adama sighed,

"Apollo why did you have to leave Boxey and me to find our way on our own?" No answer being forthcoming, he sat down with a glass of ambrosa and waited for Tigh to arrive - two old men chewing over their memories and the main memory, painful though it was, had to be Apollo.

As the door closed behind him Troy turned and slammed his fist into the wall.

"For Sagan's sake Apollo why did you have to die?" he groaned, not noticing the quiet footsteps coming up behind him. A gentle hand on his shoulder made him start.

"Would talking help?" came a low musical voice. He turned to face an attractive middle-aged lady. Her sweet face was framed with soft grey curls, and, through her gentle smile, he read her concern.

"Oh I don't know, Aunt Cassie," he started. "It's just that ..... well, I can't seem to get through to grandfather these days."

"I know," she told him quietly. "It's hard for you, but it's just as hard for him; he's still grieving for Apollo too."

"And it's at times like this that I could do with my father," Troy sighed, near to tears.

"You'd be a very lucky young man if he was here to help and advise," she told him seriously, hoping to break through his grief, "Apollo was on his own most of the time, Adama rarely helped him."

"And he was prepared to let my father go on a mission that had a good chance of failing," Troy rejoined bitterly, then, catching a look of pain in Cassiopeia's eyes, he asked more gently.

"How do you deal with Starbuck's death so calmly?"

"I suppose I was prepared for it in a way," she replied slowly. "He'd cheated death so often, but I always knew it would only be a matter of time."

"But to lose both Starbuck and Apollo!"

"My one consolation is that they died together. Starbuck was so afraid of dying alone you know; and as they were together in life so they are together in

death, of that I'm sure."

"That's all very well for you Aunt Cassie, but it doesn't help me. I saw them die right in front of my eyes. They're dead, and I don't know why. I ....." Troy choked and ran off down the corridor. Cassiopeia looked after him with tears in her eyes.

"I'm sorry Apollo, I don't know how to help him," she sighed.

She was lucky, Cassiopeia realised. At least she knew why Starbuck had died. It didn't take away all the hurt she felt inside but it helped. As she walked slowly back down the passageway she heard his voice again:

"I'm going out there Cass, with or without the Commander's permission. Apollo's my friend and he's in trouble, I can't just leave him, I'd rather die first." *Prophetic words, Starbuck,* she thought as she remembered him running towards the turbo-lift. followed by the other pilots who were equally determined to disobey Adama and go to help their captain. *I'd rather die first* - the words whispered round her mind; yes, she knew why he'd died and it did help a little. She hoped that Troy would find the answers he sought soon because the despair which was eating away at him could so easily destroy him.

Troy leapt off the turbo-lift and ran across the hanger-deck. The technician bending over the viper's turbo suddenly found himself flying across the floor, pushed out of the way by Troy as he jumped into the cockpit. The turbos sprang to life and the viper shot down the launch-tube into the soft velvety blackness of space. With blurred vision, Troy pointed his craft away from the fleet, pushing it to the limit of its speed, until the whole metal structure screeched in protest.

The vision of Apollo's viper racing back from that mission which had been doomed from the start, hit, out of control and crashing into Starbuck's, filled Troy's mind. He could almost hear Apollo's cry of horror and warning, microns too late to save his friend. He saw again the sight of the two burning vipers, twisting and turning, wings locked and then the final horrific explosion that had stunned the whole fleet. The fireball that had erupted as testimony to their passing seemed to hang before him even now. *Why? Why? Why?* He repeated the word over and over again until he could bear the pain no longer, and, burying his face in his hands, he wept.

Behind the speeding viper, the fabric of space rippled and there suddenly appeared a ship of great magnitude. Its crystal turrets and pinnacles shone, lit by some internal light, whilst goodness, truth and purity seemed to radiate from it. The ship glistened as it swiftly closed the gap between itself and the tiny viper. Troy was so caught up in his sorrow that the white out-riders went unheeded, and he hardly noticed the piercing noise in his ears.

It seemed just an extension of his despair when he lost consciousness.

Troy came to in a high vaulted room. Crystalline pillars soared upwards until they disappeared into the heights above him. The pure whiteness made his eyes ache, and he blinked, feeling a sense of well-being envelop him. All around him there was a concerned whispering. He swung his legs off the couch on which he was lying and carefully sat up. Shadowy figures stood in front of him and he rubbed his eyes. Gradually they resolved into figures that were oh so familiar.

"Father?" he whispered.

"Boxey." Somehow the name from his father's lips didn't rankle as it did when others used it.

"Father, where am I?"

"On the Ship of Lights," Apollo told him.

"Am I dead?

"No, you're not dead."

"But you are, aren't you?"

"Yes, we are." And then Troy noticed for the first time that Apollo was surrounded by many of the pilots he'd known - Boomer, Jolly, Sheba, Starbuck and others - and they were all smiling at him.

"Are you ghosts?" he wondered aloud.

"No, we're not ghosts," Starbuck told him with a big grin, and Troy suddenly realised that the pilots were as he remembered them from childhood. He looked around him.

"No mother," he sighed wistfully. Apollo smiled, slightly sadly Troy thought.

"No," his father replied. "She died on Kobol and this is only for pilots who die in space." Troy nodded his understanding as they started to walk through the echoing rooms, leaving the other warriors behind.

"Why am I here?" Troy asked at last, breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

"So that you can be shown that death is not final, that there is life afterwards."

"But you must be ghosts then."

Apollo laughed, a sound that Troy had heard less and less of as he had grown up, and which now took him straight back to his childhood. He looked closely at his father, noticing that the haunted shadows behind his eyes, which had deepened as he had got older, were no longer there and that an aura of peace now shone from them. He brought his thoughts back to what Apollo was saying.

"No we are not ghosts. Our spirits have been given this tangible form so that you can see and talk to us, that is all."

"Oh." Troy could think of nothing else to say. Apollo turned and scrutinised the pale face beside him, reading the despair, anger and loneliness in it.

"I'm sorry I had to leave you when I did," he ventured at last, "But I thought you were old enough to take over where I left off. That was my dearest wish, I hope I wasn't mistaken."

Troy's shoulders stiffened.

"Of course you weren't mistaken, Father. It's just been rather difficult to adjust, that's all."

"I understand Boxey," his father assured him. "It was difficult after I lost Zac and then, with Serina gone, I didn't know what to do for a while, but there are more lives on that fleet depending on you than just your loved ones. You mustn't let them down. Now we are gone, you and the other young warriors are their only hope." Troy bowed his head in thought, then he looked at his father and for a micron it seemed as if he didn't see his father but a being of immense compassion and understanding.

"I understand what you are saying," he whispered, "or at least, I think I do."

"Well that's a good beginning to build on," Apollo assured him warmly. "And don't grieve for us. As you can see, as we were together in life, so are we together in death. Death just means meeting loved ones again." Troy looked around him and saw that they had been joined by the other pilots, shadowy but familiar faces from his past, and he knew that he had to be true to their memory.

"I'll try," he promised his father.

"I can't ask for any more than that," Apollo replied quietly. "Now it's time for you to go."

Apollo led Troy back through the crystal rooms to where his viper was standing, gleaming as white as its surroundings. As Troy looked round, trying to etch in his mind the scene so that he could look back on it in the future, Starbuck came up.

"I never told Cassiopeia that I loved her, really loved her," he told the young man. "Not in life; but I've been given this chance. Please tell her that I loved her, and that it was only her."

"I'll tell her," Troy promised. The blond pilot turned away with a peaceful expression on his face, and Troy guessed that he would now be able to accept his death. He turned to face Apollo.

"Bye father," he choked, a lump filling his throat.

"Goodbye, my son," the captain murmured and he leant forward to kiss the young man on the forehead. A light breeze ruffled Troy's fringe and a voice whispered "peace" then all was dark.

Troy woke to find himself amongst the ships at the tail end of the fleet. He peered round him, wondering what had happened to him, and how he'd gotten there. Slowly he threaded his way round the ships and back to the GALACTICA. Gone was his anger and despair, he realised, and he felt at peace with himself. The viper landed smoothly in the bay and, as he leapt out, he made his apologies to the technician. He set off determinedly through the passages until he came to the door he wanted, and knocked softly.

"Come in," a voice called. Troy entered to find Cassiopeia sitting quietly at her desk. She glanced up as he came towards her.

"Troy? Are you all right?" she asked, holding her hand out to him, sensing that he was very different from the angry young man she had seen earlier.

"Yes I am now. I just wanted you to know it's all right. I .... something happened out there ..... I don't know what ..... but everything's much clearer to me now. I'm still not happy about my father's death, but I can accept it. Don't ask how or why because I don't understand it myself; just accept that it's so."

"Oh, my dear, I'm so glad." Cassiopeia stood and kissed him gently on the cheek, his face reminding her of how Apollo had looked once, a long time ago. "You know I'm always here if you ever want to talk," she offered. Troy nodded and kissed her before moving towards the door. At the door he turned.

"Starbuck loved you Aunt Cassie."

"Yes I know," she smiled. "I've always known."

Troy left Cassiopeia to her thoughts and made his way to Adama's room knowing that he had to heal the rift that had opened between them. He hesitated momentarily at the door, unsure of his welcome, before knocking and entering. Adama was slumped over his desk, half asleep. Troy crossed over to him.

"Grandfather," he whispered, resting a hand lightly on the old man's shoulder. Adama woke with a start and looked up at the young man standing over him.

"I'm sorry," Troy said and smiled at him, and some of the pure light from the Ship shone from his eyes and touched Adama, lifting a heavy weight from his heart; and suddenly neither of them felt alone - Apollo was there with them, had been and always would be as long as they needed him.